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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

AF/S FOR SDELISI, LAROIAN, MRAYNOR
AF/PD FOR DFOLEY, CDALTON
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR JFRAZER, DTEITELBAUM
LONDON FOR CGURNEY
PARIS FOR CNEARY
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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ELAB](#) [KDEM](#) [KSEP](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: SUPPORTING HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN ZIMBABWE

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HARARE 403

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

¶1. (U) Since its disputed victory in Zimbabwe's 2002 parliamentary and presidential elections, the ruling ZANU-PF party has pursued a concerted campaign to shrink individual liberties and democratic space in this constitutional republic. The government's human rights record remained poor, although political violence declined in 2003 compared to the previous year. The executive branch continued to aggrandize its power at the expense of the judiciary and the unicameral parliament, and stepped up efforts to hamstring a weakening independent media. Legislative activity during the year scaled back due process protections, and retroactively overrode court judgments and legalized past illegal acts of the government. Repressive laws were exercised selectively to constrain the activities of the government's critics. Ruling party supporters continued to harass and to intimidate critics with relative impunity. The government closed the country's only independent daily newspaper for four months and is pursuing court action to close it down permanently. The executive branch frequently ignored court orders and sought to intimidate sitting judges in politically sensitive cases. Urban and rural council and parliamentary by-elections during 2003 were marred by violence and other irregularities. The National Youth Service program was implicated in a host of human right abuses, generally associated with suppressing political opponents of the government. The nation's highly polarized and stalemated political climate was compounded by a mutually reinforcing economic implosion that touched every sector of society.

¶2. (U) Complicating our efforts to address Zimbabwe's deteriorating political situation is the government's growing apparent xenophobia toward the west. A liberation party that has ruled the country since independence, ZANU-PF has had difficulty sustaining its popularity in recent years. Its political insecurity is compounded by the disastrous failures of its economic policies, including the corrupt and often violent implementation of a land reform program. Central to the ruling party's political strategy is its portrayal of Zimbabwe as under seige by "neocolonial" forces intent on undoing land reform and robbing the country of its sovereignty. The government employs the dominant state media relentlessly to paint political opponents and critics as lawless agents of a racist conspiracy headed by Great Britain and the United States. Actions and statements of the U.S. Government are consistently distorted or fabricated to substantiate conspiracy theories and ostensibly to justify a stronger hand against regime critics. In this environment, many ruling party and government officials avoid association with U.S. officials, and Embassy access to the Government of Zimbabwe is limited.

¶3. (SBU) Underpinning the U.S. Government's human rights strategy with Zimbabwe is a recognition that resolution of the nation's political crisis is a necessary precondition for addressing the country's myriad problems, including its human rights situation. Facilitating such a resolution is a central U.S. priority. It was in this vein that President Bush consulted with President Mbeki in support of steps to resolve the crisis. In addition to ongoing U.S. consultation with the South African Government on Zimbabwe, U.S. diplomats have engaged other governments with potential influence in Zimbabwe to coordinate mutually supportive approaches.

¶4. (U) Against this backdrop, U.S. officials routinely spotlight publicly and when possible highlight privately the need for the government to improve the environment for free and fair elections and to strengthen rule of law. Politically motivated violence, flaws in the electoral process, concerns over judicial independence, limits on freedom of association, and abridgement of free speech were among many themes pursued by U.S. officials on Zimbabwe.

Official travel and financial restrictions were maintained against key government officials and members of the ruling party to signal official disapproval of their policies and to press for change. Statements of U.S. officials regularly received prominent play in the independent press, including the country's most widely circulated newspaper. Foremost among these was a June op-ed piece by Secretary Powell on the eve of the President's visit to the region and a December interview of the Ambassador. The Embassy generally assured wide dissemination among Zimbabwe's media, legal fraternity, civil society, academics, and government and party officials of human rights-related reports by the State Department, NGOs, and international organizations. Prominent coverage of human rights themes at embassy public affairs resource centers (approximately 100,000 visited the one in Harare, for example) and the Zimbabwe-specific programs of the Voice of America influenced opinions inside Zimbabwe and throughout the region.

15. (SBU) To document Zimbabwe's human rights situation, USAID funded a well-respected human rights organization that comprehensively gathered and disseminated information on cases of alleged abuses. In addition, USAID-funded programs assisted victims of political violence, including documentation of atrocities, and supported centers for victims of torture and political violence in urban centers throughout the country. The Democracy and Human Rights Fund (DHRF) and USAID further enhanced provision of legal services to victims of political crimes. U.S. diplomats also personally interviewed victims of political violence and maintained a visible presence at politically significant events, including party rallies and election activities. To bolster domestic election observation capabilities, USAID facilitated an independent local election observation NGO on capacity building and deployment costs. The Department sponsored three Zimbabweans for human rights-related International Visitors Programs (IVPs) last year, and the Embassy's resource center helped local human rights organizations access human rights material on the internet as a means to develop their capacity and effectiveness.

16. (SBU) To fortify the integrity of democratic pluralism in Zimbabwe, USAID provided a range of assistance to strengthen legislative committees, one of the few venues where civil political discourse between the ruling and opposition parties still occurs openly. In addition, USAID funded training for organizational and leadership development, internal and external communications, and financial management within selected democratically oriented organizations. USAID cultivated grassroots democratic capabilities by bolstering accountability mechanisms among democratically elected municipal officials and facilitating their contact with international counterparts. To help build a foundation for active citizen participation in political life, USAID has funded a number of civil society organizations, providing them with training and technical assistance to help them advocate to the parliament on issues of national significance. USAID provides similar assistance to a number of grassroots organizations that work with municipal authorities. DHRF funds went to support the establishment of an Institute of Peace, Leadership, and Governance at Africa University, and USAID/ASHA funded the infrastructure construction costs for the Institute. The Department slated eight Zimbabweans last year to attend IVPs on governance-related themes.

17. (SBU) To bolster access by Zimbabweans to balanced information, ESF funds supported Voice of America broadcasts to Zimbabwe five times a week. The program featured interviews by Zimbabwean announcers with U.S. policymakers and Zimbabwean opinion makers on a range of key political, economic and cultural topics. The program is the only broadcast of its kind on both AM and short wave, that targets Zimbabweans who have limited access to independent media. Shortwave Radio Africa, partially funded by USAID, also provides Zimbabweans with alternative sources of news about their country. USAID has funded activities to fortify the capacity of Zimbabwe's strained independent press, and public diplomacy efforts have devoted particular priority to concerns about freedom of press. In addition, USAID has funded Business Operating Centers that, among other services, will allow ordinary Zimbabweans to access independent media sources via the Internet. USAID also has funded capacity building and training for a public opinion institute to conduct polls and gauge public opinion on topical issues, including governance, and to hold public seminars that review findings and inform policy makers. The Department facilitated participation by two prominent Zimbabwean journalists in a slate of activities in the United States under a Voluntary Visitors Program.

18. (SBU) In supporting religious freedom, the Embassy has collaborated closely with clerics involved in pressing for resolution of Zimbabwe's political crisis. Through public and private statements and dissemination of relevant public documents such as the Department's Human Rights Report, we have underscored official concern about the government's

arrest and intimidation of religious figures who criticize the government.

¶9. (U) Advancing women's issues, DHRF funds went to help the Zimbabwe Women Lawyers' Association print a civic awareness manual to educate rural women on their voting and other civic rights, and for workshops to present the manual. DHRF funds also enabled a parliamentary women's caucus to hold workshops and build capacity among women members of parliament. The Department sponsored a Zimbabwean activist for an International Vistors Program on "Women as Political and Economic Leaders". The Embassy also sponsored a workshop on domestic violence for law enforcement officials and interested civic society representatives.

¶10. (SBU) Supporting workers rights through an American trade union organization, USAID has funded a program of the Solidarity Center to assist trade unions in Zimbabwe to become more accountable and responsive to their memberships and more effective at representing the interests of their constituents. Funds were used to provide professional economic and legal advice, to support new offices, to facilitate staff travel to membership chapters in the field, and for training in economic literacy and organizational development. On several occasions, the Embassy advocated to the government on behalf of the American organization representative in Harare in connection with difficulties he had in maintaining his legal residency. Finally, the Department sponsored a visiting expert who spoke to wide Zimbabwean audiences on alternative conflict resolution mechanisms, particularly in the context of labor relations.

¶11. (U) The Embassy has promoted interest in and scrutiny of trafficking-related issues among civil society and NGOs generally concerned with human rights in Zimbabwe. We have projected official concern about trafficking issues in Zimbabwe through public and private statements and dissemination of public documents such as the Department's Trafficking in Persons Report.

¶12. (SBU) As for evaluating the success of our human rights strategy in Zimbabwe, we still have a long row to hoe. Again, restoration of an acceptable human rights regime here will hinge largely on the ability of Zimbabwean players themselves first to resolve their political stalemate and of the Government of Zimbabwe to subject itself to the will of the Zimbabwean people and the rule of law. Our comprehensive strategy is necessarily long term -- geared first to foster resolution of a political crisis while sustaining crucial democratic institutions through parlous times. In the longer run, those democratic institutions we help to sustain -- free press, independent judiciary, civil society, equitable electoral process -- must serve as the foundation of a healthy polity that now seems so distant.

¶13. ADDENDUM: USG-FUNDED PROGRAMS OF USD 100,000 OR MORE (FY-03 only, not including funds that carried over from FY-02) --

DA-funded activities:

NGO advocacy -	620,000
Local governance -	486,000
Victims of Torture -	461,000
Victims of Conflict -	977,000

ESF-funded activities:

Trade unions -	300,000
Public Information/VOA -	1,500,000

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